

Italian president pardons officer involved in CIA renditions in Italy

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At the end of last week, Italian president Giorgio Napolitano issued a pardon to US Colonel Joseph Romano. Romano, the head of security at the US Air Force base at Aviano in northern Italy, was involved in the CIA-led abduction of the Muslim cleric, Abu Omar, in 2003.

Omar, a political exile living in Italy, was abducted in broad daylight from the streets of Milan in a joint operation by the CIA and Italian military intelligence agency, SISMI. The abduction of Abu Omar to Egypt and his subsequent torture is one of the most notorious cases of the US practice of “extraordinary rendition.” Many details of the operation were made public in a series of trials of Romano and CIA agents in Italian courts.

With his decision to pardon Romano, the Italian president has defied the Italian courts and given an official seal of approval to the criminal military and security policy of the American government.

A statement issued by the presidential office of the 87-year-old Napolitano, who began his career in the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI), declared that the pardon for Romano was prompted by changes to US security policy made by President Barack Obama.

Napolitano claimed that since his election, Obama had “put an end to an approach to the challenges to national security ... considered by Italy and the European Union not compatible with fundamental principles of rule of law.”

In fact, despite all of his election promises to break with the illegal methods of his predecessor, George W. Bush, the Obama administration has expanded the mandate of the American security and military forces to abduct and liquidate anyone identified by the State Department as an opponent of US imperialist interests.

In his initial election campaign, Obama promised to

close down the Guantanamo Bay internment camp set up by his predecessor, once elected. Five years later, Guantanamo is still operative. Dozens of inmates, who have been long since declared innocent of any offence, are currently conducting a hunger strike to protest against the abominable conditions of their imprisonment.

Obama has also continued the policy of rendition initiated by Bush, as was demonstrated by the appearance of three Europeans of Somali origin in a Brooklyn courtroom last December. The men had been apprehended in the African state of Djibouti on the orders of the State Department in Washington, which accuses them of being terrorists. FBI agents took charge of the three men when they arrived on American soil last November.

What has changed under Obama is the selection of much more lethal methods to wipe out opponents. Faced with the possibility of prosecution of US agents in foreign countries involved in extraordinary renditions, the Obama administration has increasingly resorted to drone strikes to wipe out on the spot those it identifies to be terrorism suspects, including US citizens.

As the WSWWS has reported, Obama is personally involved in the selection of targets to be liquidated at regular “Terror Tuesday” meetings of military and intelligence officials. This year, US Attorney General Eric Holder mooted the possibility that the US government might also assassinate people, including US citizens, within US borders.

The statement from Napolitano’s office confirming the presidential pardon for Romano declared that Italy sought the same leniency for two of its marines currently facing murder charges in an Indian court over the shooting of two Indian fishermen.

Napolitano apparently hopes that his intervention on behalf of Romano will be rewarded by US pressure on India to release the two accused Italian sailors.

At the same time, Napolitano's endorsement of Obama's security policy is a warning to the Italian and European working class. The ruling elite is prepared to use criminal, police-state measures against its own citizens, under conditions of growing opposition to reactionary austerity policies in the European working class.

Napolitano is the head of state of a country which has been without a government since elections six weeks ago. He is currently seeking to cobble together a coalition of discredited parties in order to continue the hated austerity policies of the country's outgoing unelected leader, the banker Mario Monti, who was overwhelmingly rejected at the polls.

In its latest report, the International Labor Organization warns of a growing danger of social unrest in Europe, as unemployment soars and austerity measures intensify the economic crisis. The ILO report singles out Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Italy as countries particularly prone to such unrest.

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